

02/18/2009
Benjamin Freund
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Chairmen Roy and Meyers and members of the Environment Committee:

I am testifying in favor of Proposed H. B. No. 5272 AN ACT CREATING A RELIEF FUND FOR CONNECTICUT DAIRY FARMERS and Proposed H. B. No. 5483 AN ACT CONCERNING FINANCIAL RELIEF FOR THE DAIRY INDUSTRY.

As chairman of the Connecticut Farm Bureau Dairy Committee, I want to thank the dairy working group of legislators as well as this committee for the opportunity to consider the contributions of the dairy industry to the State of Connecticut and how we can sustain those important economies.

My brother Matthew and I own and operate a 270 cow dairy farm in East Canaan, CT that provides over 600,000 gallons of fresh milk annually. We own 400 acres and rent 400 additional acres. I want to discuss how we run our business to enhance your understanding of what we offer Connecticut and how our business fits into the important green model that will define our State.

No carbon footprint nutritional model can compete with fresh food produced locally. Milk production has an intense economic multiplier effect and contributes to nutritional security. In addition our farm is typical of many farms in the state which operate their resources under farm specific USDA Nutrient Management plans. These plans are expensive to implement and attract significant federal dollars to encourage adoption of conservation practices. Last year the federal 75% cost share on our farm exceeded 200,000 dollars. We constructed a covered manure storage area as part of a long term plan to optimize clean water running through our farm. In prior years we installed gutters on all of our barns to direct clean water away from any nutrient load. Run off from feed piles, that are high in biological activity, is collected and distributed where it has benefit. Roofs are installed to keep water from running through areas where cattle feed. CL&P helped install efficient cooling systems, low wattage efficient lighting, variable speed drives, efficient motors, and energy free watering systems. USDA Rural Development has invested in a demonstration in vessel composting system as part of a solution to reduce manure volume and increase the effectiveness of the nutrients available. Since 1997, the energy that heats the farm home and heats all of the hot water used in the milking center is generated by burning methane harvested from the cow manure. Our fields are minimally tilled to save energy and reduce the environmental carbon load. We test soils twice a year to prescribe the precise amount of fertility to feed the plants and avoid any excess. We always close our annual harvests with cover crops to conserve the soil and provide green manure in the Spring. We graze the animals during the growing season to take advantage of the natural harvesting and nutrient spreading characteristics of the cow. Our farm represents many decades of hard tuition invested in learning how to marry our valuable natural resources with efficient production systems that provide wholesome food to our neighbors.

All of these practices represent years in developing an environmentally aware industry that contributes much more than the obvious products adding great benefits through sensitive production systems. Connecticut farmers are not only in compliance but also lead the way showing the rest of the country how it should be done. We know because we live side by side with non farming neighbors how to be good neighbors. We not only use we preserve open space and enhance wildlife corridors that can disappear in a heartbeat. Our neighbors appreciate this value and it is documented with hard values in the UCONN Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Connecticut's Dairy Industry report.

My brother and I want to continue to feed our state and our families. We need more security than the federal milk price provides. It is too volatile to attract the next generation. In these times of low pay prices we live off of our equity and run our credit lines out to the maximum. Our value to Connecticut is too important to let our industry decline to an unsustainable level. Please support the proposed bills to provide a safety net to our industry so we can continue to provide food security, enhanced conservation, open space, and important economic activity for Connecticut.

Respectfully submitted,
Benjamin Freund
For the Connecticut Dairy Industry